

## Learning Arabic On Your Own

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Quite some time ago, a discussion took place on the now defunct Siraat.net messageboard regarding people's experiences in learning Arabic with members sharing their experiences, giving tips and things of the sort. On another forum I was a member of, a sister had asked me how I learned Arabic (I'm still learning, by the way), so I took what I had written on Siraat.net and adapted it for that other forum. I thought those tips may be of some benefit to those who visit my blog, so I'm reposting it here.

### **Tips for Those Who Want to Learn Arabic, and a Brief Mention of My Experiences With It.**

(Adapted from a post I made on Siraat.net's students of knowledge forum on the topic, written some time before Jan. '05)

Firstly, check your intention. This is **key**. It won't necessarily make things easier, but it will gain you some rewards for what you're doing, rather than increasing a possible punishment for doing it for the wrong reasons.

Second, it would be good to decide on what your goals in learning are going to be—i.e., do you just want to learn how to read and listen to lectures for yourself, or do you want to be able to communicate fluently in Arabic with others. Both entail different things here and there, and knowing what's more important to you right now will help you in deciding what things you actually have to do in order to learn/understand the language.

For me, the first was/is more important than the latter. Being able to read and listen to lectures doesn't involve as much effort as being able to communicate fluently. I'll explain why. Being able to read and listen for yourself only requires basic knowledge of Arabic grammar (along with vocabulary, of course), whereas being able to communicate fluently will require more knowledge and a better understanding of forms and how to conjugate verbs and what not. It will also require more knowledge about the words themselves as you'll need to know how to pronounce words properly. With reading, this isn't as important because a lot of the time you'll recognise the meaning of a word by the context it's found in.

For being able to read and listen for yourself, you'll only really need to go as far as Book 2 of the Madīnah books by Dr. V. Abdur Rahim. Finishing book 2 should give you the basic grammar needed to help you understand things. The hard part after completing that will be amassing vocabulary.

The best way I know of to build your vocabulary is to translate books and articles for yourself. You have to get used to thumbing through your new best friend, Hans Wehr, and not get impatient with searching for words and meanings. Hans Wehr is probably the best Arabic-to-English dictionary you can use due to the fact that it arranges everything according to the root words. This forces you to learn how to pick them out and learn which letters from the alphabet can't be added to roots in order to make new words, and I can't stress enough how much this helps. Because Hans Wehr doesn't have a lot of words in it though, it would be good to compliment it with another dictionary like al-Mawrid. It's got a ton of words in it, but it's all arranged in alphabetical order of actual words, not according to roots.

As for books and scholars to start out with, Shaikh Ibn 'Uthaimîn, may Allah have mercy on him, is an excellent place to start. Shaikh 'Abdur-Rahman bin Nâsir as-Sa'dî is a good choice to start translating from as well—especially in the case of his exegesis, *Taisîr al-Karîm ar-Rahman fî Tafsîr al-Kalâm al-Manân*, which was written intentionally in easy to understand Arabic for the general masses to get a good understanding on the meanings of Allah's book. It's also straight and to the point, not mentioning a lot of the different jurisprudential rulings derived from verses and differing opinions regarding what the verse refers to. He just tells you what the verse means in short, plain and simple words. *Tafsîr al-Jalâlain* is pretty good in that respect to (i.e., just giving you what the verse means, without a lot of added discussion), although you will have to watch out for the mistakes it contains.

One tip I can give with regards to reading and translating, even if you think you know the meaning of the word pretty well, look it up to make sure. This will help in strengthening your vocabulary and reinforcing your understanding of the language.

Another tip, again, is to try not to lose patience. Even if you have to look up every word in the sentence, keep plugging away. Eventually things will get easier and your understanding of the language will grow and the number of words you'll have to look up will decrease. If you find that it's taking you too long to figure something out, either find someone you can ask to help you with that part, or leave it and start on something else. When I'd get stuck, I'd try to ask someone what the part I was stuck on meant, and also ask them why it means what it does. If I couldn't find someone to help, I'd leave what I was stuck on and start working on something else. After sometime, I'd come back to the thing I was stuck on and try again. Try not to get stuck on one thing for too long, cause it'll just discourage you and waste time you could be using to work on other things and keep your learning in motion. It won't really matter too much if you don't finish what you're working on because you're only doing it to learn. As long as you're translating/reading something, your learning will continue and your knowledge and understanding of the language will grow.

For being able to communicate fluently, you're going to have to learn a bit of 'âmmî. Well... you don't really have to, but it will help a lot in terms of being able to understand others easily as well as communicate easily with them. Find someone you know who knows the language pretty well. Have them talk to you in Arabic only in order to force you to start using it more. Having that someone to enforce the "no english when speaking to me" rule in full effect will greatly help you in terms of progressing at a quick pace.

Anyhow, that's pretty much all I can say right now, as I've already spent enough time on writing this post. Allah willing, this helps somewhat and adds to what's already been mentioned (i.e., what had already been posted by others on siraat.net regarding this topic).

Your brother for Allah's sake,  
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